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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 COTONOU 000020

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DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS INL/AE
LAGOS FOR SAM GAYE

E.O. 12958:N/A
TAGS: [SNARPGOVBN](#)
SUBJECT: DRUG TRAFFICKING IN BENIN

REF: (A) STATE 165562 (B) 07 COTONOU 893 (C) 07 COTONOU 867 (D) 07
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1.(SBU) Summary: The GOB's weakness in controlling its borders and allegations of corruption in its police force present serious challenges to fighting drug trafficking in Benin. According to published reports and friendly government sources, cocaine and heroin transit Benin, and marijuana is cultivated and used in Benin. The GOB has the will to act against drug traffickers but lacks the equipment and the honest and well-trained police force such enforcement requires. End Summary.

2.(SBU) As detailed in Ref C, Benin is a transit country for cocaine and heroin, and marijuana is cultivated for use in Benin. Approximately 420 kilograms of cocaine was seized in Benin in 2007. This marks a remarkable surge over 2006 seizures of approximately 23 kilograms of cocaine. According to information from the French Police Attache, cocaine from South America and heroin from South-East Asia transit Benin en route to Europe. According to the French, it continues to the United States via Charles De Gaulle airport. The GOB lacks any real equipment for detection of drug trafficking at its borders, and does not have the capacity to interdict traffickers at sea. In that regard, there is a strong possibility that trafficking in narcotics in Benin is a larger problem than current statistics indicate.

3.(U) The GOB passed anti-drug legislation in 1997 modeled on the United Nations Drug Convention and adopted a national policy on combating illegal narcotics in 1999. President Yayi's government, which has been in office since April 2006, has shown interest in fighting drug trafficking and corruption. After Benin's largest drug bust in August 2007, when more than 360 kilograms of cocaine was seized after a drug running vessel ran ashore off the coast of Ouidah, (Ref D) the GOB moved swiftly to investigate allegations of police corruption in the cocaine seizure. When the GOB's investigation revealed corruption within OCERTID (Central Office for Repression of Illicit Drug Trafficking), the Beninese National Police's anti-drug division, the GOB ordered the arrest of five members of OCERTID including Roger Talon, OCERTID's director at the time. The National Director of Police, Antoine Azonhounmey, was subsequently fired for insubordination when he failed to comply with the Minister of Interior's directions to bring the officers under investigation before the investigating judge.

4.(SBU) In addition to the GOB's willingness to take action against corrupt police officers the GOB has asked repeatedly for U.S. assistance in improving its police force to fight against illegal drugs (Ref B). Felix Hessou, the Minister of the Interior, is a credible interlocutor who appears to have a sense of urgency in combating illegal narcotics trafficking in Benin.

4.(SBU) Minister Hessou's efforts are undercut by the weakness of OCERTID, the police division responsible for combating narcotics trafficking. OCERTID's limited forces have little training or equipment. OCERTID's Director and Deputy Director were both arrested on allegations of stealing and trafficking the cocaine OCERTID recovered from the August 2007 drug bust in Ouidah. Benin's security forces depend solely on finding drugs during searches of people or goods and from tips from the public. Benin does not employ equipment or dogs in its searches. OCERTID can perform limited testing on seized drugs to determine their composition. It requests assistance from its counterparts in Nigeria to perform advanced testing. While Benin has criminalized money laundering, the police lack the capacity to effectively investigate and prevent it.

5.(SBU) The French government is the most active bilateral partner in assisting the GOB to improve its capacity to fight against illegal drug trafficking. In the past, the French provided counter-narcotics training at OCERTID and training at the national police school in Porto-Novo. Additionally, the French Embassy has a full-time Police Attache. Pending funding, the French plan to expand the number of trainings offered in Benin and will begin, in 2008, to build a computerized network, which will allow Benin's police force to share information on major crimes.

6.(SBU) Comment: President Yayi and his administration are committed to countering corruption and have taken a series of anti-corruption measures since they began governing in April 2006. His Minister of the Interior takes the problem of narcotics trafficking seriously but lacks the resources and a trained and honest police force to lead the fight. USG assistance to improve Benin's ability to combat drug trafficking would be welcomed by its political leaders who have shown a willingness to move against it. End Comment.

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